

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly  
February 21, 2012  
Submitted by: Daria M. Plummer, Retired Educator, South Windsor, CT

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daria Plummer. I am a retired Connecticut educator of 39 years, 38 years in Connecticut and one year in Massachusetts. I taught with pride and passion; it was my pleasure to teach children and to work with parents, staffs, and communities throughout my tenure as a public educator.

If you are reading this testimony because you could not be present for this portion of the public hearing, kindly envision me as you read these words. If you are present as I am speaking, allow me to describe myself as follows: I could be your or your spouse's mother or grandmother, an in-law, relative—a sister perhaps—or a friend. I could be each of the same of your closest friend.

I represent thousands of retired teachers who could not be here this evening because they cannot drive distances on the highway at night due to aging degenerative eye conditions that make such travel unsafe and who, if they could travel, need to care for grandchildren or aging, ill spouses, or simple age prevents them from driving at all. Or perhaps they did not hear about this hearing at all as it was scheduled only last week and today's television coverage is focused on the active teacher changes within the budget. Perhaps older residents, retired teachers, don't count as important enough?

**That is the perception.**

**Had you chosen the teaching profession, I could be you.**

I am here to testify against the Governor's proposal to reduce Connecticut's contribution to the Retired Teachers' Health Insurance Fund (Health Fund) by over \$15,000,000, shifting the obligation of the savings onto my retired colleagues and me, which will result in a nine percent (9%) increase in our health care costs for our Medicare supplemental plan. Nine percent, ladies and gentlemen, equals a yearly increase of over \$400 per person. Perhaps that does not seem like a horrible or burdensome increase to you, but with gasoline in my community on its dramatic daily rise, predicted to be \$5.00/gallon by Memorial Day and the price of cereal, bread, and milk at levels commensurate with a 9% increase, the choices have and are becoming increasing stark and dire: food, the ability to drive to buy food, or health care.

I have paid and continue to pay into the Health Fund, both as an active professional and as a retiree. My insurance costs have gone up yearly, both for Medicare Part B and for my Medicare supplemental plan through the State Teachers Retirement Board. I have yet to realize a yearly maintenance in retirement benefits as the cost of medical insurance has risen annually, compounded by no COLA increases for the past two years. Most of my colleagues, including myself, will not even see the new COLA increase until July 2012, as it is dependent upon one's retirement month.

Additionally, over two thousand (2,000) teachers, those who retired prior to the Education Enhancement Act twenty six years ago, exist on pensions based upon minimal teaching salaries. For many of them this increase will be catastrophic.

Why must retired teachers, those who worked daily in your communities for decades, bear this budget cut and be so encumbered? Why cannot something that is unhealthy for everyone and that raises health care costs—tobacco, acknowledged junk food, including soda, be taxed more heavily? Where is common sense about medical health?

Additionally, I wish to speak against the Governor's proposal to merge the State Teachers' Retirement Board (STRB)—not because of where it is proposed to be merged (Office of the State Comptroller)—**because what we have works and works well**. Did you know that the Connecticut STRB provides services for its active and retired members for \$27/member (active/retired)? No other teacher or state employee system in the United States comes close to matching this cost efficiency. Our STRB is a role model agency and this is how it is rewarded? Why are you proposing to change something that works so well, despite chronic understaffing and budget reductions?

It appears that teachers are becoming the scapegoats in education reform, 2012, Connecticut style. I apologize for being harsh in that statement, but what else can I believe? Look at the facts:

This public hearing was scheduled in the *evening* to discuss issues affecting retired teacher health costs.

The budget proposed *increases health care costs by 9% for retired teachers*.

*The Governor wants to eliminate the demonstrated efficient and effective STRB's autonomy.*

As the well known and repeated adage states: **Perception is reality**. Teachers are the scapegoats.

I urge you to demonstrate your respect and support for those who have taught for decades in Connecticut by rejecting these two aforementioned proposals found in Governor Malloy's 2012 budget proposal.

Thank you.